

REGENERATION



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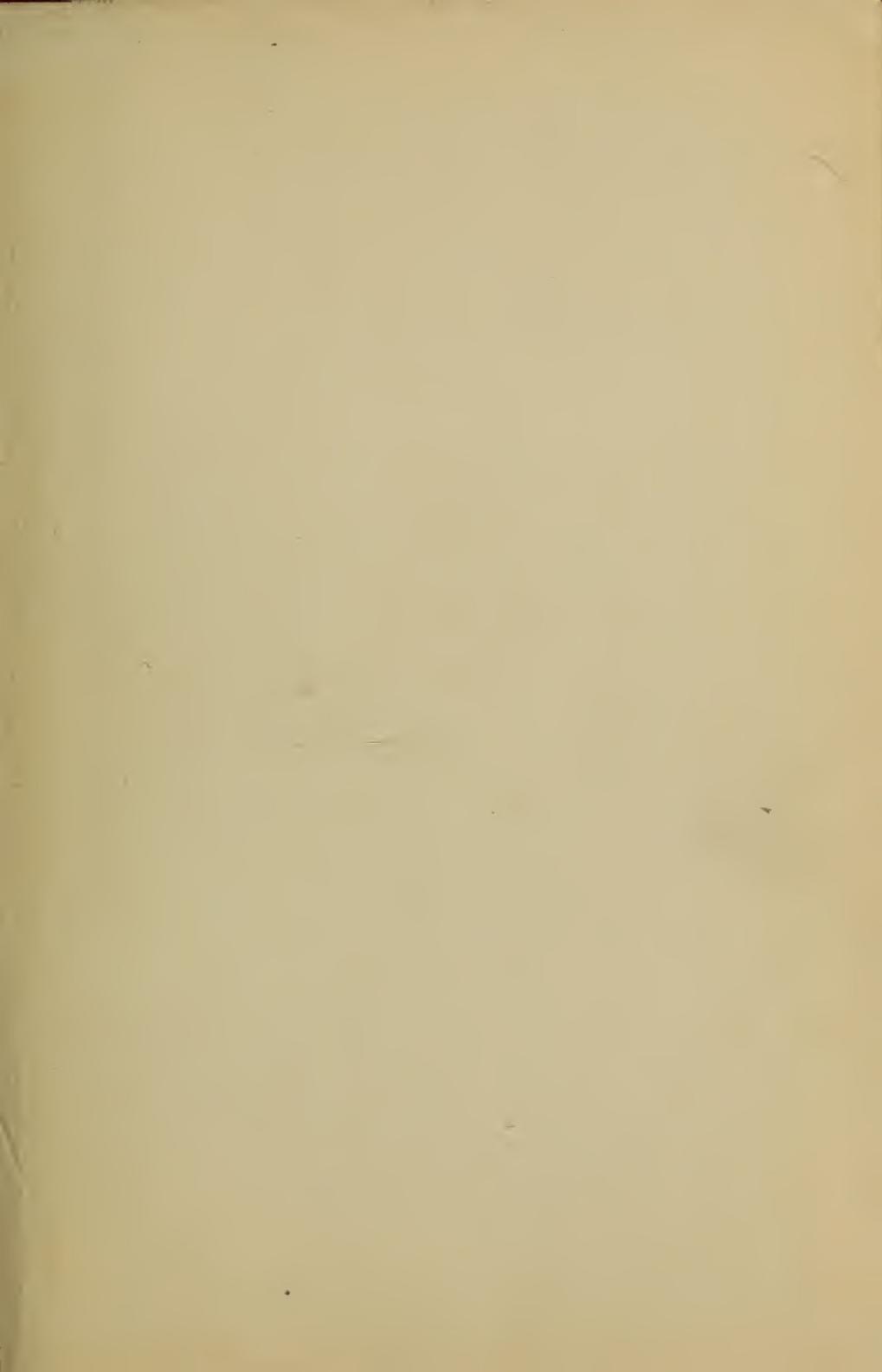


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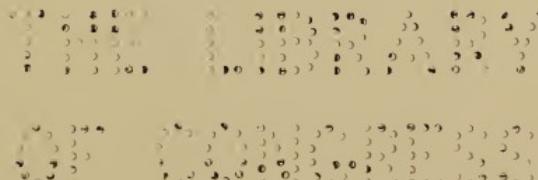


REGENERATION

BY

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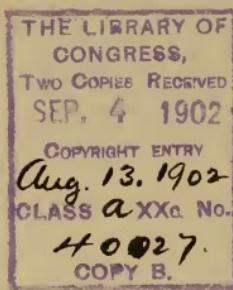
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INTRODUCTORY.

UNDER a most beautiful figure, the first representative of our race, fresh from the Creator's hands, is said to have been placed in a garden. He was to keep it; that is, to direct and enlarge its powers of production. Everything in it he was to use for his own subsistence and advancement, with a single exception. This exception was pointed out to him as bearing the power of death. A thousand agencies invited to life; a single one threatened death.

Two commands had been given him in love. They had reference to his relations to the earth, as fresh from the Creator's hands as himself. One enjoined him to fill this new earth with a race bearing the stamp and image of himself, which was also that of his Creator. The other one suggested his natural supremacy over the life and forces of this new world, into which he had been

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placed, and commanded that he subdue them; that is, become master of them, for in so doing he would subdue the earth itself. "And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it."

But his ability to render obedience to these two commands, exhibiting his appointed relations to the natural world, was made dependent upon the character of his actions in the garden. If here he was obedient then all else appointed him would follow easily and naturally; but if disobedient then the shadows and pangs of death would settle down upon him, and follow him and his posterity. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

He at once lived in two worlds. In the one before him stretched out forest, and prairie, and sea; and above, the blue canopy of heaven. In the other was a planted garden, watered, and appointed solely for him. In the one he was to give himself to the functions of animal life, have dominion over other forms of animal life, and gain the mastery over the material universe of which

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he was himself a part. In the other he was “to dress it and keep it,” to choose his highest good in obedience to his Creator’s command, in that which appealed to himself as “good for food,” “a delight to the eyes,” and “to be desired to make one wise.” He was an inhabitant upon the earth, but he was also a citizen of a kingdom whose holy sovereign was his Creator.

He fell. From this kingdom his act of disobedience made him an alien, for here no subject asserts himself in contradiction to his sovereign. The choice of self-gratification unfitted him for citizenship in the garden. He was sent forth, now, to struggle for subsistence and dominion. Now an alien, by an act of his own choice, he is left to those motions of his being, those impulses of his moral nature, which harmonize with the character of his own choice. He has indeed fallen. He was doubtless created for immortality; he will now be subject to death. He was free to choose, and, having chosen the evil, the possibility to sin has become an impossibility not to sin. Even the whole imagination of the thoughts of his heart has become only evil continually. His course of moral being now will flow on in separation from God.

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REGENERATION.

CHAPTER I.

STATEMENTS FROM GOD'S WORD.

WE are to consider that subjective change wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, which, in theological language, is called regeneration. We are to remember, at every step of the way, that we have before us as the subject of regeneration the individual man, possessing a depraved nature. He is not to be regarded as subject to the penalty of original sin. That was fully paid upon the cross by the perfect Man. Under the covenant of grace his separation from God, springing from depravity transmitted without his knowledge or choice, is to be overcome by the pardon of sins committed, and by recreation of the moral nature to purposes of obedience to God, and to choices of the good.

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In the Holy Scriptures this change is variously designated. At the time of the first passover following the baptism and temptation of Christ, while in conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus declared, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The same thing is spoken of in Ezekiel 36:26, 27, when God, after declaring his purpose to cleanse his people, says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." In Ephesians 4:22, 23, the apostle indirectly exhorts, "That ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." And again it is said, II. Corinthians 5:17, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

In these passages regeneration is spoken of under the figures of being "born again," of being given "a new heart," of putting "away the old

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man," and of being "a new creature," and in I. John 3:14 it is represented as a resurrection, for the apostle says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life."

The reader will recall other passages. For the present purposes let these suffice; but let it be noticed that in their character they are highly figurative, and remembered that figurative language is often used to express the profoundest truths.

CHAPTER II.

STATEMENTS OF THEOLOGIANS.

THEOLOGIANS have had much to say in explanation of those passages of scripture given in the preceding chapter, and of others similar to them, as well as of their application to human experience. Many theories have been deduced, directly or indirectly, from references made in God's Word to the change of attitude assumed by men when they really accept God as their sovereign Father, and Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. A few of these are given for purposes which will appear. No attempt is made to classify them, or to arrange them to correspond with any order of scriptural passages.

In an old Calvinistic confession occur these words: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that which is good,

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and dead in sin, he is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereto. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by His grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good.” This is somewhat at variance with the declaration in the Tridentine Canons, “If any one shall affirm that the free will of man, moved and excited by God, coöperates nothing by assenting to God thus exciting and calling, so that it disposes and prepares itself for obtaining the grace of justification, but like some inanimate object does nothing at all, but is merely passive, let him be accursed.” [It should be noticed that the word “justification” in the above statement necessarily includes regeneration.] From the Belgic Confession, “We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ’s sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied.” From the Thirty-nine Articles, “We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith.” From the Auburn Declaration, “Regeneration is a radical change of

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heart, produced by the special operations of the Holy Spirit, determining the sinner to that which is good, and is in all cases instantaneous." From the confession of the Free-will Baptists, "This change is an instantaneous renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit, whereby the penitent sinner receives new life, becomes a child of God, and is disposed to serve him." From the Reformed Episcopal Articles, "Regeneration is the creative act of the Holy Ghost, whereby he imparts to the soul a new spiritual life." Richard Watson says: "Regeneration is a concomitant of justification. . . . It is that mighty change in man, wrought by the Holy Spirit, by which the dominion that sin has over him in his natural state, is broken and abolished, so that, with full choice of will and the energy of right affections, he serves God freely, and runs in the way of his commandments." A broader and somewhat more purely philosophical conception is seen in the words of Edmond H. Sears when he says, "The way of our regeneration lies through bitter repents and death-struggles for victory. The path . . . is open and plain. It is simply self-denial, until there is no self to deny." The Delitzsch doctrine may be thus stated:

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"Utter ruin was the consequence of the fall. . . . The Son of God became man, not by assuming our nature, in the ordinary sense of those words, but by ceasing to be almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent, and contracting himself to the limits of humanity. It was a human life into which he thus entered. . . . It is this divine nature in the form of humanity, or this divine-human nature, which is purely and simply, though perfectly, human, which is communicated to the people of God in their regeneration."

There is probably nothing gained in presenting other views, and yet, for the sake of the choice variety given, the definitions selected by the Rev. John Winebrenner as given in his "Treatise on Regeneration," page 98, are here repeated. Dwight, "A relish for spiritual objects." Brown, "God's implantation of holy principles in our hearts." Baxter, "Nature's reparation, elevation, and perfection." Helfenstein, "The restoration of God's image in the soul." Finney, "A voluntary change in the governing preference of the mind, or a change of choice." Campbell, "Regeneration literally indicates the whole process of renovating or new-creating man." William Law, "Regenera-

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tion consists solely in the restoration of the birth of the Son of God in the human soul.” E. D. Griffin, “Regeneration is a transition from supreme selfishness to universal love, from enmity against God to supreme attachment to him.” Dr. Gill, “Regeneration is the production of the new man, or a new principle which was not before.” George Duffield, “Regeneration is the commencement of spiritual life.” Witherspoon, “Regeneration is the reparation of the loss which man sustained by the fall.”

And now, can we leave the theologians to possess the field, since they have so well covered it? But take even a cursory glance at these statements. It is readily seen that they present many and varied theories of the doctrine, and that they suggest all shades of soteriology, from absolute human monergism to absolute divine monergism. It is, therefore, evident that whatever is meant by the Scriptures in such expressions as “born again,” “new heart,” “putting away the old man,” “new creation,” etc., interpreters differ widely, both as to what the thing itself is, and as to the manner in which it is brought about; and this, not only as to agencies employed, but also as to ef-

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fects produced in the consciousness of men. Either the scriptural language with reference to this matter must be obscure, or men's philosophies color their understandings of scriptural truths, or there must be a profound mystery imbedded in the expressions used by the inspired writers, or man has not yet attained to that ability to conceive spiritual things to which God intends he shall come in order clearly to apprehend his dealings with him. A shade of all these supposed difficulties may enter into the case. Doubtless the language is rabbinic, and preconceptions determine interpretations. But more: To himself man is a mystery, and yet the natural and moral worlds must be held together, in their respective operations, by an incessant administration. Shall we assume his clear perception of the agencies and energies that fashion his being, or the seemingly miraculous combinations necessary to the generation of a spiritual life, so natural, so divine? Has he become that being to whom God's revelation is the unsealed book? Let the ages to come first build stepping-stones to heights not yet attained! Then why attempt to define regeneration? And yet, man treads a path whose glory forbids his being silent. His soul's

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nativity is still the garden of God. Thoughts that wander from eternity refuse to be repressed, and faces unknown, and voices articulating not a word impel his inmost being, and he speaks. His words are meant to tell his dearest hope,—that evil flee, and goodness fill his soul with the rapture of an angel's smile; it is regeneration.

CHAPTER III.

GOD'S ACT.

REGENERATION is to be considered from two standpoints: 1. From the Godward side. 2. From the manward side. From God's side, it is an act of his almighty power exercised upon the sinner's depraved nature, giving the spiritual ascendancy over the carnal. From man's side, it is a thing received, an effect produced, a change wrought by an agency entirely outside of himself, and absolutely beyond himself or his direct control.

No shadow of the efficient cause of the regeneration of the sinner can be found in himself. He lies in sin crying for help, but helpless. He makes himself ready for regeneration by knowledge, and faith, and repentance, and conversion; but justification and regeneration are purely acts of God, and his alone, on account of the favor grounded in the gift of Jesus Christ, which is constantly operative within its own parallels. When the sinner puts himself within these parallels of God's

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favor in Jesus Christ, instantly the act of God which makes him a new creature is performed by an omnipotence full of grace and mercy. The potency is not in the sinner's act, or in any combination of acts of which he is capable, "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work."

This act of God cannot be defined. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." There is, therefore, but little to say of the act of regeneration as performed by the Almighty, except as it affects us; for we can neither describe it nor determine it. We believe he forgives us our sins, and changes the fountain of our being, from which spring affections and acts, so that instead of bitterness there is sweet-ness, but to assume to determine the definite limits of these acts were indeed presumption. The entire plan of redemption as laid down by the Almighty is based upon truths which in their last analysis lie far beyond our comprehension.

The Bible record is a revelation of God, and in it the plan of redemption is set forth, but we may

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with profit cease our controversies in relation to our interpretations of it, for we shall never understand, and if we could, we should not be materially advantaged. Better turn our attention to a definition of our own instincts and impulses, and the motions of our own being under the divine influence and agency, and to the development of a science of the soul with reference to spiritual things, as men have set forth a science of the mind with reference to things pertaining to the intellect. With the Father there "can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." Concerning the certain and unchanging we need not question. That is positive and always available in accord with its own laws. With man all is tentative and changing. How shall the fitful human, subject to countless counter-influences, many of which are subconscious, define its relations and interpret them? The old adage, "Know thyself," is still good philosophy.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPERIENCE.

SINCE the introduction of Pietism and Quietism much has been made of what is commonly called “religious experience,” and “experimental religion.” The “experience” is especially to be realized in connection with the change wrought in regeneration. It “is a sensible assurance of God’s favor in the believer’s blessed consciousness,” and is supposed by many to accompany a bodily and spiritual penitential struggle, without which there can be no spiritual experience, and, therefore, no regeneration. “This experience is crudely conceived as a striking emotional event which must be of extraordinary character in order to meet expectations.”

It is not here assumed that religious experience, either at the time of conversion or at any subsequent time, is to be regarded as entitled to a less important consideration than it now receives, or has received in the past. But we may observe

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the fact that so much emphasis has been laid upon the emotional aspects of religion that serious misapprehensions of the truth have followed to the confusion of many a sincere inquirer, and to the disgust of many a thoughtful observer. The Christian religion is not an emotionless religion, but it is not primarily an emotion or an experience. It is a great principle involving a great personality. The adoption of the principle is the choice of the personality. This personality is to be an absolute sovereign, to whom is to be given supreme service growing out of a supreme love. We are invited to make this choice, but are not called upon to suffer emotional upheavals, or to receive clearly defined witnesses of the Spirit, or to expect extravagant experiences. We are called upon to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; to take up the cross and follow him; to repent and be converted; to love the Lord with all the heart; to endure hardness, etc., and with every duty enjoined, or privilege expressed, there is an abundant promise. But every requirement is to be met in faith, and experience nowhere is represented as preceding in any sense the solemn surrender of the will and life to God.

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To seek an experience, a subjective perturbation, either for the pleasure of its enjoyment or as a sign whereby we may know that God is propitious, and then to regard such experience as may arise as the indispensable test of discipleship, is most unfortunate. The "feelings" have a complex root, and are so dependent upon physical conditions that they are utterly unsafe as criteria in these matters. That this is true is evidenced in the frequency with which the so-called converted backslide and give up their profession of Jesus Christ. Then, too, frequently it is a fact that the misguided soul primarily seeking the sign, the experience, fails to find it, and on this account falls into uncertainty and doubt and artificialness, when the religious life, which God intended to be a peace that flows like a river, becomes the turmoil of a tempest.

What is the difficulty? Undoubtedly this: Men forget that God is to be found, and not an experience; that they are no longer their own, but servants of a Master whose service is joy. There is really nothing to seek except God, and finding him is far different from finding an experience. Having found him in regenerating grace, one will re-

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joice in God, and in true godliness. He will say with the prophet: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me . . . with the robe of righteousness."

"I delight to do thy will, O my God;
Yea, thy law is within my heart."

His emphasis is upon his relationship to the Lord, and from correct relationship and service he draws his pleasure. There is no evidence of a barren chase after emotions, but of an overflowing delight in contemplation of a redeeming Jehovah.

Religious emotions are good, and not to be despised; but they are not to be directly sought, or to be chased after for their own sake. "They are to come as the unforced attendants of our religious faith and devotion and obedience. When thus coming, they are wholesome, and helpful, and natural. In every other case they are unwholesome, harmful, unnatural." The real peace and joy come naturally, in God's chosen order. They arise in the repentant, surrendered soul centered upon God in contemplation of his unmeasured grace, when it profoundly yields itself in loving

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submission and active obedience to the will of God, in accord with the provisions made in Christ Jesus, the Saviour. He who anxiously seeks happiness never finds it.

It will be seen, then, that duty and privilege and service are to be emphasized in our own lives, and our emotional nature left to itself to bring us pleasure if it will, pain if it must. And yet, who does not prefer pleasure to pain? and who is not frequently disquieted by the fears which arise in answer to his doubts? Even after our conversion, or confirmation, and union with the church, inquiries unanswerable do arise, to our dismay, disastrous, not only to our peace of mind, but to our endurance as well. Do not these figure in the religious life? Ah, yes, too largely. But the servant of God, with his eye upon the Captain of his salvation, must have too many conquests to make, and see too great incentives in the glories of his victories, to allow thoughts that wander from the nether regions to discomfit him. When God smiles upon him he rejoices; when clouds overshadow, either in persecution or in doubt, he rejoices that he is "counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name." God is to be seen, the filial spirit culti-

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vated, the soul surrendered in loving obedience, the King's business attended to with haste and fidelity, the forces of the soul marshaled against evil, the Spirit's voice distinguished as supremely authoritative,—blessed he who can consume himself in these with never a thought of experience.

But what can be done when fear and doubt persist in driving from the timid soul the peace and comfort it rightfully claims in the service of God? There is a servile fear which is the product of doubt; and there is a virtuous fear, the effect of faith. Seek this by renewing faith, and renew faith by shrinking from sin. Fear not to find God in mountain and sea and sky, but most of all in the conscience and in the will. Fear to lose him; for such filial fear animates us to avoid what would be offensive to our Heavenly Father, and to consult his desires as to our choices and motives and acts, and to hold sweet converse with him as friend with friend. Read his Word, and study it sufficiently to learn what is his plan for our lives, and his blessings for our experiences. Interpret closely the teachings from human lips, upon which you depend for comfort and instruction, and receive them judiciously, distinguishing carefully

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between theological language and the language of experience. It is easy to speak of being "born again," or of receiving "a new heart," of "loving God," or of "loving our enemies," in set phrases that mean but little to the speaker, and less to the hearer, and yet place an emphasis which, to the anxious learner, not accustomed to giving attention to theological terms and to making allowance for the mode of their expressing things really to be experience, suggests utter hopelessness, because seemingly utter impossibility. Wait upon God, and when he speaks, obey, hearkening unto him rather than unto men, or self-convenience, or self-gratification, in pleasure if can be, in pain if must be; and doubt will sleep, and fear will flee.

But as you would avoid perdition itself, avoid cultivating a right feeling without right acting. Feeling is given to lead to action as well as to bear testimony to it, but when it awakes without passing into duty it soon slumbers again and forgets to ask for duty. Our feelings are delicately correct when unconstrained, but we shrink from the discharge of duty which they suggest, and their feeble flutterings stirred by sermon or providence subside to give empire to other feelings of less sen-

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sitive nature. The modest voice of conscience shrinks from the overmastering influence of self-complacency and self-gratification.

And now, notwithstanding the uncertainties and abuses of experience, let it forever be remembered that God gives his faithful ones an experience. "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him . . . and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. . . . These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy be in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled."

CHAPTER V.

THE NEED.

WHATEVER may be the philosophy of sin, the conscious experience of men bears testimony to the fact that some great fountain of evil lies deep in the human nature. Our "involuntary powers" seem constantly to be generating a brood of unholy things to infest our inner world, so that when we become conscious of their presence they are already taking the form of sin and wrong.

On the one hand, a constant watchfulness is necessary to avert the injuries and wrongs with which we are threatened at the hands of others. And it is evident that these come not always accidentally, but that they are frequently associated with acts purely intentional, though not necessarily primarily designed to inflict injury. The motive behind them is self-advantage. The injury in which they may result is a matter of indifference.

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On the other hand, when the eye is accustomed to introspection, it is easy to discover in ourselves the same motives and impulses which, in others, threatened the wrongs and injuries averted only by our watchfulness. But here they seem not nearly so culpable, or so seriously objectionable. Some strange transformation has taken place, and the thing obnoxious and profoundly to be despised in others has become the friend in us, and our most valued support.

The question naturally arises, What is this double-faced sphinx, now white, now black, now friend, now foe? It is clear that the claim of rightness does not only demand that a pure motive shall inspire every act, but also that the act shall be so performed as to be followed by a result not harmful. It is equally clear that the mere accident of location does not determine the character of a motive or an impulse. The thing that is wrong in my neighbor is wrong in me. What, then, makes it seem different? The instinct of self-preservation? But self-preservation is not self-aggrandizement. The one is divinely implanted; the other is the outflowing virus of a self-centered, depraved nature. It matters not what name is

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given to the thing within the human breast which causes self-interest to overshadow and practically to blot out of our program the good of our neighbor, or of the community, it still lies at the bottom of every violation of justice and of righteousness.

And what shall we say of our acts in relation to God? What inspiration led to folly so consummate and presumption so damnable as to lead a human nature entirely uncorrupt and unperverted, needing no revelation but the deep and clear intuitions of the mind itself, to assent to the falsehood of a proposition carrying with it the disobedience which should send down through the generations so broad a stream of distress and death? "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise," self-gratification weighed in the balances against the expressed will of the Creator, and ever since it has appealed to men with greater force than his often expressed desire that they "should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." The Golden Rule would be easily observed were it not that selfness holds down the

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truth in unrighteousness. From the first, man was in unity with God, and made in his likeness, intended to be self-impelled and self-controlled in righteousness, but by the insistence of selfness, and a choice of self-gratification, the head of the race placed himself in antithesis with God and so opened a place for distrust and disobedience, and not only sinned, but became sinful. From that time until this, every generation has come down a line of tainted ancestry, and, by the irrevocable law of descent, evil has had opportunity to gather strength and volume on the way. The result is that the affections are frozen; the intellect is blinded; the will is in bondage.

From this wreck of lofty powers and holy aptitudes has descended a stream of pollution and sin, wide as the human race, and whose miasmata have vitiated all life, so that gloomy superstitions and varied idolatries in all stages of civilization permeate society and attack the citadel of every soul. Nations and tribes, as well as individuals, are separated by a mighty selfishness that has instigated wars and feuds, slain justice, and dried up the fountains of brotherhood. Even Christian nations and Christian society cherish their favorite

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falsehoods, and there is more truth than poetry in the couplet:

“Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne.”

Nor is this condition of affairs the result of bad example and evil influence. There is that back of influence and example, which, on the one hand, is the fountain from which influence and example are the outflow, and, on the other, the ocean into which they empty. The internal forces of human nature include elements which are evil, and only evil. Always in conflict with every holy impulse of the soul, they are the mind of the flesh, which is enmity toward God; for to the law of God it is not subject; neither can it be; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Selfishness in its many-sided forms, malice, revenge, hatred, cruelty, deceit, and a thousand forms of acquired self-gratification devour every holy instinct. These are that “body of death” from which Paul desired release, and from which every soul must be delivered as the pilgrim was of his burden when he came to the cross. These, and others like them, are they which degrade the natural appetites, affections, and powers, in themselves good when

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serving the higher nature, into degeneracy and sensuality. Here is unbelief, the native-born of hell, changing the hope of the immortal spirit into the darkness of despair; and here rebellion and blasphemy and disobedience in myriad forms, growing disaster and shame and death in the native soil of the human heart. How far distant the realization of the prophet's dream, when he said, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Divine revelation in its entire scope assumes the truth so tersely put by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." The fabric of human life is made from the warp of disobedience and the woof of sinful acts and motives, and the sacred record is that it is a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that deal corruptly: they have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward. . . . The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and festering sores; they have not

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been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil."

The situation is most deplorable. Society is corrupt and needs renovation. Every individual is a sinner against God. "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." We cannot restore ourselves. "We are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment." God cannot set his approbation upon beings wanting "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." The kingdom of heaven is closed against us unless we have the filial spirit. "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." The heart sees not, and cares not, and God at last gives us up to our own destruction. "And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural

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affection, unmerciful : who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they which practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practice them."

Moreover, the visitations of divine wrath in deluge, bondage, and pestilence ; the invitations of divine mercy in law and precept and prophetic warning ; the expression of divine compassion in promise and vision and song ; the outgoings of the human heart itself in prayers and lamentations and the offerings of sacrifices, all combine in emphasizing the sad story of man's sin and separation from God, and his most urgent need of a creation within himself which will in some degree restore to him the communion and fellowship with God, by some means lost.

But the most profound expression of man's need of a new life is Jesus Christ himself. In his character he sets forth what man was intended to be. The perfect manhood exemplified in him must forever, on the one hand, exhibit God's ideal, and on the other, man's infinite deviation from rectitude. The price he paid for man's restoration measures not only the value of the human soul, but, also, the spirit of brotherhood and helpfulness found in

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the perfect man himself, to which every human being needs to be born again. No such gift, as is He, could be offered by infinite Wisdom unless a commensurate need existed. And to become a new creature in Christ Jesus, to be born again, to be released from sin, and the power of sin, how profoundly to be desired!

CHAPTER VI.

PROVISION MADE.

EVERY provision made for redemption is based upon the primary provision of the atonement. The penalty attached to the violation of God's law contemplated certain wise ends. The atonement is what was substituted in the place of the penalty to answer the same ends as would have been attained in relation to justice by its infliction upon the transgressor. It is grounded in the love of God, and admits the showing of mercy to the condemned criminal without infringement upon the demands of justice. It was made by the Eternally Begotten of the Father's love, who, from the beginning, had the divine nature, but did not look upon equality with God as something to cling to, but made himself poor by taking the nature of a servant and being like other men. Then as a man he came among us and humbled himself by submitting to death, even the death of the cross. "In

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whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ."

The disobedience which destroyed in man both the likeness and favor of God made him not only a transgressor of law, but also a despiser of the Lawgiver. We hate those whom we injure. Justice would have allowed him so to remain. God was under no obligation to redeem him. Mercy would lift him out of his guilty, ruined, helpless state, and make him a friend again. Love bore the burden of the wonderful plan of redemption, which proposes not only to forgive actual transgressions, but also to renovate the whole nature, upon conditions absolutely in accord with justice, and honorable to the Sovereign as well as to the subject.

Why there is no remission without shedding of blood does not enter here, but that it is a profoundly significant and blessed fact that the Heav-

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only Father did give his Son as an expression of his love, and that this Son of God, and son of Mary, by his life and suffering, his resurrection and ascension, has made every provision necessary for man's return to his Father's house, must never be forgotten, or lost sight of, in the philosophies of life. And if the mere mercy of God, without vicarious sacrifice, or repentance for sin, or a visitation of punishment, or the suffering endured in this world, is a sufficient ground of hope, the sinful heart has not yet learned to believe it. And if the sins of the past can be blotted out by future good conduct, and if moral evils can be overcome by a process of restoration or recuperation, it has not yet appeared that the soul stirred by the instincts of its divine nativity can restfully repose upon such propositions. The faith that justifies is based upon the eternal truth that God hath "at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, . . . who, . . . when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." "Wherefore, holy brethren, par-

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takers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus." Then let us not believe that God was made propitious or moved to mercy by the atonement, but that in wisdom his benevolence and disposition to show mercy led him to give his Son as the expression of love.

This atonement made in the offering of Jesus Christ distils into man's native domain an all-pervasive energy redolent with the fragrance of Heaven's love. Of himself man seeks not God; God seeks him. And so in the deeper fountains of his life he is subject to under-currents which seem to originate in the eternal mysteries of God. And when he yields himself to these strange forces, to loose his being from the thralldom of sense, the messengers of the unseen, with velvet touch, persuade his soul into a unison with the eternal verities of God. He is now in half-conscious communion with troops of glorified beings whose conquering spirits possess his heart. The spirit-world is not far away. He feels its breathings upon his soul, and his mind runs through unaccustomed channels. The fountains of his being are troubled by an unseen agency. He lies in a

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porch of Bethesda. God has mercifully made it so that in every one's life there come times when the loneliness of midnight seems to brood over him and the world's jangling voices are stilled, and he awakes in some degree to a recognition of realities of which he has been ordinarily unconscious. But what mean these thoughts that wander from eternity? Only this, that deeply imbedded in the mortal is the immortal, and now and then the mystic life of the spirit asserts itself over the sense-life. It is God calling loudly, homeward. The involuntary powers of our souls arrested, with an overmastering energy He faces us toward eternity and toward heaven. It is the Holy Spirit taking of the things of God and manifesting them to us—to us—to our subconscious selves; and brooding over us, thoughts of eternal relations recur with growing urgency.

And so the King's highway is made to lead "from the lowly earth to the vaulted skies," and pilgrims journey thither impelled by grace divine, and yet what nobler exercise of godlike function than to choose Him whose love is life!

CHAPTER VII.

AGENCIES USED.

THE agencies engaged in effecting regeneration have already been referred to in various connections. The intent in this place is to name them in direct relationship to the renewal of the soul. They are to be regarded as employed of God in procuring man's assent, and as directly efficient in producing the moral renovation of the soul, as well as used by man in bringing himself to meet God upon the conditions of the gospel.

1. The Word of Truth. This, in the objective form of revelation, is found in the Bible. It is evidently intended by its Author to be the inspirited instrument by which man shall definitely learn the essential truths of his salvation, to be inwrought during an earthly pilgrimage.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And light unto my path.”

It warns us in the story of man's sin, and enheartens us with its message of redemption. It

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shows sin twining itself about the heart and engrafting itself upon life, poisoning the affectional nature and binding the will, until our own free action lies subject to the slavery of hell. It shows our passions that sweep us impetuously and relentlessly forward to the limit of life, and into the gloom of death; but it lifts the pall of death and shows the stream of life, making glad the city of God. Its record of sin is dark and dreadful, but its promise of life is the golden chain of infinite love stretching from Eden, by Haran and Bethel and Sinai and Moriah and Calvary, into the city not made with hands. James declares, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And the psalmist says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." The great apostle boasts, "I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

This "word of truth" God has graciously provided for the reinforcement of the religious instincts with which he has endowed the soul, and to be the basis of all religious instruction. And he is using it more widely than ever before. It is now at the command of every one in Christian

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lands, and within the reach of multitudes in heathen lands. He directs its proclamation in thousands of pulpits and its teaching to millions of Sunday-school scholars. He has instilled its precepts into the literature and jurisprudence of all civilized nations. And he declares, "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." It is the source of our information and the instrument of our quickening.

2. The Holy Spirit. He takes the truth and interprets it and applies it. The word of revelation becomes efficient as God's Word when the Holy Spirit energizes it, and he does so only for the soul surrendered to his will. "If any man willetteth to do his will he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." "No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Ghost." From the very earliest he hovers over the soul and warms into life every seed-truth. By his agency the heart is prepared for every exercise by which it is opened to the reception of Jesus Christ, and the embrace of the truth. "And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of

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righteousness, and of judgement. . . . Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: . . . and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” In the accomplishment of the full preparation by the Holy Spirit, the mind informed, the heart inclined, the conscience convicted, the faith enriched, the choice made, the will surrendered, the act of forgiveness and renewal is involved and consummated. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

CHAPTER VIII.

BORN AGAIN.

THE manward side of regeneration is conversion. It may be designated as the objective expression of that change of the moral nature which is wrought by the Almighty in regeneration, or that radical change in man's purpose which is logically distinct from repentance and faith, but which accompanies them. In conversion man is the agent. He sees his mistaken position as to Christ and the church, turns square about, and commences a new life. Faith and repentance and conversion and justification and regeneration are all logically distinct, but they all enter into the coöperative process by which the new birth comes about. No one of them is in entirety ever present without the rest of them. Justification may not take place without regeneration, or conversion without justification, or choice of God without faith and repentance and conversion. "For whom

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he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

As to the conscious recognition of the process by which one becomes a child of God, it may be said that possibly no two persons are affected alike. It would probably be safe to assume that regeneration itself is similar in all cases, but it is doubtless true that effects which are wrought upon the subconscious self in one case, in another stand out with remarkable boldness and definiteness of outline. Not infrequently that part of the process which we had hoped to realize in conscious experience most definitely, has been wrought without a hint to our consciousness of its occurrence. It occurred, but it escaped our observation. Possibly we had thought great sorrow for sin, or a great hatred of sin, or a profound self-abhorrence would be felt; but when we were most completely convinced that such ought to be the case, and were most desirous that it should be so, we had no such experience. Or we had been taught that there is

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a great difference between historical faith and evangelical or saving faith; but in our consciousness we were never able to distinguish one from the other, if there really are two kinds of faith. Or we had thought some marked change would be recognized in regard to the things we loved or hated; but in our real experience we could not discover that we loved God more or hated sin more than before our so-called conversion. Or we had hoped to experience some marked subjective change whereby the soul would be filled unutterably with joy; but we were not so filled. Any one of these disappointments, or all of them, may have been experienced in conversion, and it might have been a thorough one, carrying with it justification and regeneration. Conditioned upon a person's choosing God and his giving himself to that choice with no reservation of will, the grace of God works in him both to will and to work. The work of grace may be like the wind that bloweth where it listeth, but nevertheless the wind blows, and the work of grace goes on.

The artificial distinction made between historical and evangelical faith is very convenient for the theological treatment of faith from a doctrinal

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standpoint, but so far as its manifestation in the experience or to the consciousness of the penitent is concerned, it amounts to absolutely nothing, except that it often confuses the mind of the penitent. In experience, faith is faith. It includes a trustful assumption of the truth by the mind, and a trustful surrender to the truth by the will. It may be more of one than of the other, but never, for any length of time, all of one and none of the other. There is a truth and a beauty in the expression, "Believing is receiving." But choosing Jesus Christ is receiving him, and surrendering to Jesus Christ is receiving him. He stands in direct contrast with that which is designated the world, and choosing him or surrendering to him puts one in alienation from the world. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." If, then, in our conversion, our attention should be placed upon our choosing Christ as our Saviour, and faith in its operation be unobserved, let us allow no fears lest God should not justify, for justification, which always includes regeneration, accompanies choice, and

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choice is based upon faith, and without saving faith no true choice of Jesus Christ is ever made.

Our self-abhorrence on account of our sinful nature will probably be stronger when our experience in attempting to ward off the approaches of sin is more mature. That is theological language, often used for rhetorical effect, which describes the soul newly born into the kingdom of heaven as just convulsed with hatred of sin of every type and in every form. The same kind of language is used for the same purpose in describing this same soul as utterly consumed with a fervid love for the Saviour. It is a newly-born soul, a babe in Christ. No such hatred for sin is usually experienced, no such love for Christ or his church or his people, and unless one is capable of changing theological and rhetorical language into the language of experience, there is only one of two conclusions possible: either the description of the change in conversion is false, or there is some radical deficiency in our experience.

The situation is quite different from that described by thoughtless ministers and enthusiastic laymen. If the babe in Christ has such a tremendous hatred for sin, how does it come that

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after he has grown up to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus he has so precious little of it? If one-fourth of the people who were genuinely converted twenty years ago really had in their hearts the hatred for sin which many of them demand that the present-day penitent shall experience immediately upon his conversion, the millennium would dawn at once. And if, on the other hand, their own hearts were really aglow with that fervid flame of love which they so glibly attribute in figurative language to the experience of the newly converted, and to their own, the world would have been evangelized long ago, or at least there would have been a better effort made. But they have no such hatred, no such love, and never had. They have had a glorious sense of God's presence in a keenly experienced sense of joy; they have felt the quickening thrill of his Spirit, and the hard lines of hatred and love dissolving; but that abrupt, radical, and unqualified exchange of the things they loved and hated, never. The word "love" has been used in the ordinary sense usually given it.

The truth is evident. Regeneration does regenerate the whole man. Our faculties cannot be so

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dissociated as to allow one to be renewed and another not. The mind is to be illuminated, the eyes of the understanding opened, the heart renewed, the will conquered, and the man made willing. Every power and faculty is to become changed in “putting on the new man,” but this is a process following conversion and its concomitants. It may very legitimately be called a regeneration, but it is the regeneration which is the completion of the “growth in grace” to which the holy Word exhorts God’s children. But that regeneration which is the beginning of the Christian life, and which we have in the main under consideration, finds its chief ground for operation in the human will. The will being renewed, which is the commander of the citadel, the final arbiter among all the so-called faculties of the soul, so directs the powers over which it presides as finally to bring them to a permanent victory over the enemy, because into instinctive accord with Jesus Christ. The conflict to be waged by every Christian goes on between his sense of right and his choice of right, on the one hand, and the rebellious, unsubdued affectional nature on the other. He has given his will to the performance

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of duty ; he has recognized the claims of *o-u-g-h-t* upon his moral nature, and he is calling into line every faculty refusing to perform duty, and compelling its coöperation with his purpose. This is the field over which the Christian's warfare rages. He is a soldier for Jesus Christ, but the battle-ground lies in himself, and the conflict goes on between his own evil desires and propensities, on the one side, and his new will to do right, on the other, notwithstanding the fact that his whole being is said to have been regenerated, and the other fact, that upon this field of combat are often marshaled the forces of light and of darkness employing the native forces of the soul in the dreadful conflict.

Moreover, the temptations of which we speak as threatening our fidelity to Jesus Christ, and our constancy in the religious faith, are the register of our spiritual renovation, as pertaining to the sensibilities. But who would venture to say that no one who suffers temptation is really regenerated? And how could one experience temptation if the sensibilities had been so completely renovated as to leave no vestige of love for things sinful, through which an appeal might be made?

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If the whole nature had been completely turned to God in regeneration, so as to produce an absolute hatred for things sinful, and an absolute love for things godly, no place would be found for temptation. The very facts of temptation and of Christian warfare declare in most positive language that roots of bitterness do remain, and that regeneration does not necessarily and immediately produce a complete change of the affections so that the heart loves only the godly and hates only the evil.

They also declare in the same way that the “spirit of the mind” and the “will” have undergone a more nearly complete and radical change than anything else about us. Our ability to know has not been changed. A dullard converted is still a dullard, and just as much of a dullard as before, with the single exception that he has become wise enough to give himself to the service of God.

But we are changed creatures when God’s regenerating grace has diffused itself into our being. The spirit of the mind has been renewed, not the mind; and the will has become sanctified in the holy choice of God, not godly things; and these, by the coöperating grace of God’s Spirit, and the

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use of the instrumentalities appointed for exercise and growth, are to exhibit in the life the fruitage which naturally follows sowing at seed-time, and cultivation thereafter until the maturing of the full ear, according to the will of God. The holy Word says, "Son, give me thine heart," and, "A new heart also will I give you." The "heart" as used in God's Word is the very core of the being. It is the fountain from which the affections flow, but it is also the point at which the intellect takes its stand of observation, and the will exercises its dominion in response to the needs of its subjects. "A new heart," a new purpose, a new choice, a new determination, self-impelling, and self-controlling power, facing toward God, which will make dead your affections for the world, and call into existence and manifestation a genuine love for him, "also will I give you," and instead of the vacillating, drifting character, facing away from God, that you were, you will be a new man turned directly to an opposite course of conduct, "and a new spirit will I put within you."

But regeneration also implants true love in the soul. In what seems contrary to this statement, the word "love" has been used in the ordinarily

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accepted sense. Here it is used in the true scriptural sense, in which love is quite a different thing from affection, as naturally existing between parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife. If love were this kind of affection, the command to love our enemies were a command to do an impossible thing, except in theory. The third time Jesus was manifested to the disciples after he was risen, he said to Peter, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" Peter evaded the question by answering, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I have affection for thee." After his vacillating course of conduct at the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of his Lord, Peter could not say that he properly appreciated the relations which really existed between him and Jesus, and that he gave himself fully and affectionately to the recognition of those relations, and to the determination of his course of conduct in accord with them. But this was Jesus' inquiry when he asked, "Lovest thou me?" And this is the new love that springs up in the heart, in the very core of our being, in regeneration. This is the love we are enjoined to bear to our enemies. It is the mark of the "new creation in Christ

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Jesus," and is also the love we are commanded to exercise toward God. It is a deep-seated principle of righteousness, influencing and controlling every act and motive, and is not an emotion or an affection. It finds its chief seat in our volitional being, and not in our affectional nature. Operating in accord with our sense of rightness, it is a higher, holier thing than mere affection. It does not exclude affection, for it is all-embracing, including every faculty or power of the soul, and its every possible operation, to restrain or incite unto a recognition of God's claims.

The marked subjective change we had hoped to experience in conversion, but did not, is nevertheless an actual verity; yet we were not directly conscious of regeneration. The fountains of our being lie far beneath our observation. They must have been changed, for "Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter? can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs? neither can salt water yield sweet." The regenerated man *is*—that is all. What he *is*, is different from what he was. It is the being that has essentially been changed, and in its ultimate being is indefinable.

CHAPTER IX.

EVIDENCES.

THE chief evidences of conversion are: (1) A genuine and deep-seated choice of God. (2) An absolute and solemn surrender of the will and life to God. (3) A constant and invincible determination to overcome sin in one's self. (4) The filial spirit. (5) Love (not affection) to all men and to God. (6) The fruits of the Spirit.

In these are involved all those holy exercises of the soul represented in faith and repentance and prayer and confession and obedience. In connection with them are exercised forgiveness and cleansing. And withal there is strength for service which, if utilized, is followed by victory and joy and eternal reward.

A deep-seated choice of God in Jesus Christ determines one immediately for godliness as against worldliness. It is a choice between God-sovereignty in the moral nature and self-sovereignty; a

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preference expressed for the spirit of grace, rather than for the world-spirit. For this choice on the part of every man God ever waits. Upon its being made he bestows his special grace in pardon and renewal, so that when the choice is made on man's side, the blessing follows with certainty on the divine side.

The grace which precedes this choice, and the special grace of forgiveness and renewal invariably associated with it, are universal. The invitation to accept Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour comes to every man. The spirit of the atonement pervades the universe. The invitation may come like the far-off echoes of our own heart-stirrings, or under a conjunction of circumstances appealing so powerfully to the sense of obligation to God as to stir the soul to its utmost depth. In any case, the choice of the subject is the demand of his Sovereign.

The Man of Nazareth came to his own, and his own received him not. He stands contemplating the holy city. It is symbolic of a kingdom and a sovereignty involving the moral universe. He stretches out his hands—in blessing? No, it is the gesture of address,—and hear his words, “O

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Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." He willing; they unwilling. Or was it the wail of an overwrought nervous system, chiding a not too appreciative public? "*Would not*"; that is the key to the situation—the wickedness of an unregenerate will expressing itself in an unholy choice; selfish, stubborn, and ungodly in its application of knowledge, and in its determination of the affectional nature.

When invitations of heavenly love, and overtures of divine compassion, and warnings of eternal wrath appeal in vain to a conscience already under self-condemnation, but incapable of inspiring the choice upon which depends the freedom born of truth, because hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, the strongest possible evidence is presented that no regeneration has taken place. On the other hand, when a man, acting upon his knowledge of the deceitfulness of sin, and his sense of obligation to God, stirred, it may be, or it may not be, by perturbations of soul on account of the impending wrath of Jehovah, chooses God with

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a preference that dominates his whole being, this choice is conversion, and carries with it faith and repentance on his part, and justification and regeneration on God's part. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Such a choice, involving the application of its own law, is the safest possible evidence to one's own consciousness that he is regenerated, though not a testimony to others until it gives expression to itself in its own natural fruit. This is "putting off the old man," and the "new man" put in his place, under this choice and in accord with its law, with uncovered face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, is being metamorphosed from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit. "He that will, let him take the water of life freely."

Following the choice of God, another evidence of regeneration is found in an absolute and solemn surrender of the will and life to God. Having made such a choice, logically the will of the Sovereign takes the place of the will of the subject. But in every-day, honest experience, this is accomplished by no single volition, or consecration, or act of faith. We are Christians, yet are always becoming Christians. But let it forever be held in

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most confident assurance, that while the Christian must grow in grace, and constantly be in process of becoming a Christian, his Christian character has its beginning in a new creation by the Holy Spirit. Before this new creation was effected his will was self-centered; afterward, it is God-centered. Then there was no recognized standard to restrain the decrees of a capricious will; now God's will is the final gauge for every act, and is recognized and accepted as never before. Before conversion the person did not object to doing God's will if convenient; but afterward he directs himself to do His will, and His will only, at any sacrifice of self, time, or convenience, and puts upon himself the self-imposed task of guarding every feeling and impulse of his being, refusing them control, as formerly, in his life and in his acts. Such a surrender to a standard of morals, imposed by an authority beyond one's self, together with the deliberate choice of it as the only rule insuring safety and felicity, in both time and eternity, is the highest expression of faith, and is to be regarded as bearing testimony to the fulfillment of conditions upon which the regenerating grace of God is bestowed upon men.

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The constant and invincible determination to overcome sin in our own hearts and lives in accord with God's purpose, and by his help, also evidences the new heart. The natural man loves sin. He may oppose it in others, or hate some forms of sin which are in contrast with those especially adapted to his own personal tastes or habits, but he does not hate sin because it is *sin*, nor does he oppose all sin *in himself*, nor does he seek to be rid of *every* sin. Such opposition to sin is of heavenly birth, and the Spirit-born man despises sin. He opposes it in others, but not nearly so much as in himself. He deplores the insincerity beneath the gilded surface of society, and stands abhorrent when the deeply-hidden lakes of iniquity once in a while are uncovered, but with double care, lest in himself like sin abide, he scrutinizes and calls into account every personal act and impulse and motive, with a severity he would not think for a moment to use in dealing with others. He sees himself a sinner, but a redeemed sinner, to be made perfect in Christ. And from this state of mind, conviction as to duty, and an appreciation of privileges, are not far removed.

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The filial spirit recognizes God as a Father, who, in love and wisdom, places upon his children the restraint of his moral laws and their concurring penalties, and bestows unmeasured blessings upon them in his arrangements for their life everlasting. It does more than merely recognize the fatherhood of God; it discovers the Father. Deeply imbedded in the soul, it is that teachable spirit which so charmingly becomes the child, and so distinctively appreciates the Father's love as being bestowed in infinite wisdom, supreme intelligence, and unselfish devotion to righteous moral government. It lives in the atmosphere of confession and obedience and reconciliation, and attests the restoration and companionship which open all the treasures and powers of sonship. It affords perfect harmony and oneness with God, that concord of spirit essential to communion and communication.

To have this filial spirit in relation to God is to have the spirit of the child of God, which guarantees that constant obedience never rendered by one in the unrenewed state, and concerning the spirit of which God declares, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of

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rams.” It allows no conscious disobedience, that most subtle encroachment upon the spiritual well-being. For disobedience is the immediate cause of all alienation from God. It has been disastrous to the race from Eden until now. Nor does only a violent rejection of God’s commands fill the heart with the spirit of estrangement. As the least sin is damnable, so the smallest transgression in which one may indulge blunts the conscience and chills the heart and contributes to indecision of will and vacillation of purpose. For often in one little sin are many great ones; and many a man who counts himself a Christian exposes himself to greater dangers by daily committing small pieces of questionable business transactions than are those threatening him from all other directions. “The worst sin is not some outburst of gross transgression, forming an exception to the ordinary tenor of a life, bad and dismal as such a sin is; but the worst and most fatal are the small continuous vices which root underground and honeycomb the soul.” The solemn denunciation of God is, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not the words of this law to do them.”

But the filial spirit of obedience is the spirit

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of the child that loves; and love is brought into existence by the quickening action of the Holy Spirit. It is the bond of communion, and he in communion with God "cannot sin because he is begotten of God." It denies the small vice as well as the great crime, and preserves a tender recognition of every divine claim. It is the most beautiful mark of the precious relationship between the Father and the saved soul. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

The ability to love all men, even our enemies, attests a condition of heart not found in the natural man. As an evidence, this is more trustworthy than is a sentimental feeling of love to God. It is easy to wheedle one's self into the notion that he loves God. He seems far away. Sin is very deceitful. But our fellows! They are in our conscious presence, and speak back to us. We are not so readily led to believe that we love them when we really do not. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light. . . . But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness." "For he

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that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.” Who is one’s brother?

It is easy enough to love those to whom we are attached by the bonds of affection, but the holy injunction is, “Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you.” God exercises such a spirit to a rebellious world lying in sin. “For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Here it is evidently claimed that the follower of Jesus Christ can do more, and go further, in the exercise of love, than the publican or the Gentile. To some degree he is like God, and God’s love is no respecter of persons. To love only where the natural affections center is to love only as the common sinner loves. If one loves as the common sinner does not, and cannot love, he is something which differentiates him from the other.

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In relation to our enemies, the Golden Rule is the interpretation of this love. It is therefore under our direction, as a holy principle of righteousness. It does not spring up from the subconscious self a spontaneous product, of which the first intimation of its existence is its presence. Nor does it demand, as necessary to its exercise, the marked presence of that natural affection which rightfully exists between chosen companions or relatives. But it may ask for ministry where natural affection enters protest. Such might be the case should natural affection for our own children, divinely implanted, and right in a controlled degree, restrain us from exercising justice and benevolence to others. "What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live."

The final evidence mentioned is "the fruit of the Spirit," which is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And

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they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof." This fruit of the Spirit is the moral result which the Holy Spirit brings about by his abiding and nurturing presence. The graces named as the fruit of the Spirit are the natural accompaniment of the life of communion and communication with God, and are the distinguishing marks of the specifically Christian character. As the fruit of the vine is the highest expression of the fruit-vine life, so is the fruit of the Spirit the highest expression of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence.

But there are many commendable traits and pious exercises which have no claim to classification with the graces which are the fruit of the Spirit. They may arise from sources with which the Holy Spirit has little or nothing to do. The deep springs controlling motives and determining the moral shadings of the outward act must be under his control and find in him their source. Humane acts, hatred to sin, delight in the Bible, almsgiving, observance of church ordinances, zeal for religion or the church or benevolent societies, tenderheartedness, the giving of one's self to prayer and intercession, may all arise from other

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sources. One may even exhibit patience in tribulation and pleasure at the prosperity of religion, or suffer persecution for religion's sake, be willing to die the martyr's death, and have a strong hope of heaven, enjoy a reputation for piety and prophesy in Christ's name, and yet be far from the possession of the graces designated as the fruit of the Spirit. These graces follow the crucifixion of "the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof," and are the qualities of character which characterize the "new man" begotten in holiness. They are all subject to the limitations incident to the fitful human instrument in which they are born, but when genuine they are definite witnesses to the new life-principle characteristic of the sons of God. Combined, they present the perfect stature of him "that walketh in a perfect way." And since "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," they prove the leadings of God's Spirit.

The counterfeit is to be guarded against. To possess it instead of the real must work to our eternal undoing. The instinct of fruit-bearing is a native quality of the vine. The Holy Spirit is the fruit-bearer in us. Apart from him there are

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in us no instincts of fruit-bearing as represented in the graces mentioned as the fruit of the Spirit. Apart from Jesus Christ our course of moral being flows on in separation from God. But the Spirit represents the Christ, and was sent to brood over the hearts of such as would give him a place, to warm them into the life through which he gives expression of himself to the world. Under his immanent presence the whole course of life pursued by the child of God is wrought out. He instills the idea of the heavenly life, and guards the path and guides the feet of the pilgrim in process of attainment.

But our hearts linger. A most serious and practical question arises. After all, what is my assurance of salvation? How shall I unerringly interpret evidences of my acceptance? Jesus Christ is the only certainty of our salvation. The heart reaches out to him in faith, and if faith is strong enough to carry the weight, assurance returns on its support the answer of heaven's love. But no one may tell another how he may gain the assurance of his acceptance with God so as to preclude the possibility of doubt, and no one may receive solely from another's presentation that ap-

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plication of the truth which puts the soul at rest. That he must seek and find in his own way in a privacy with which no one may intermeddle.

A satisfactory assurance is the proper privilege of all who have turned to the Lord with full purpose of heart. But let us distinguish between assurance of the objective reality of the spirit-world and the consciousness of forgiveness. That may come as an immediate accompaniment of conversion, while this may remain to be found in reading and applying the divine Word, in leading the prayer-life, and in the scrupulous discharge of duty. After the wonderful phenomena attending Paul's conversion, one would think no question could ever arise in the apostle's mind as to the final outcome of his religious life. He was sure the Lord spoke to him, and he was convinced of his Messiahship. After three years of retirement and self-consecrating prayer and communion, the service he rendered to his newly found Master was unremitting. He saw visions. He met every demand of his conscience. He saw the Spirit fall on them who heard his message. He suffered the displeasure of his brethren, and endured chains and imprisonment. He rejoiced to be counted worthy

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to suffer for the Name. He knew whom he believed and was persuaded that he was able to guard that which he had committed to him against that day. He was even caught up into the third heaven and saw what was not lawful to be communicated. And yet his assurance was not of such a character as to relieve him altogether from fluctuations and self-watch lest he should be found a castaway. The treasure is in earthen vessels. We have a thousand limitations to forbid the finding of absolute testimony within ourselves. Not often may our warfare completely vanquish old lusts and appetites regarded sinful. Doubts arise and cloud our faith, and the promises of peace vanish.

Many persons living the Christian life are unhappy because they too exclusively seek to find in themselves evidences of acceptance and forgiveness. But there are always two of us, and while one consents the other questions, so that we seek in vain within ourselves to find anything absolute to compel us into peace. We cannot be conscious of the act of forgiveness. That is with the Father. We are only conscious of being in the state in which one is who is forgiven; but we are not always conscious of the state in which we are.

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Our only hope lies beyond ourselves. "Have faith in God." The kingdom of Christ cannot fail. Christ has made himself immanent in humanity. In the surety of truth he has become our Saviour. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." All we can do is to make a complete consecration of mind and heart and body, of possessions and place in society, to the Lord's Christ, and for the same purposes for which he came into the world, and let him accept the consecration as he sees fit, to make the vessel unto honor, or unto dishonor. To trust him is the heavenly frame of mind in which we rise to heights to sing victorious songs, while messengers of peace attend.

Full assurance is the Christian's victory. There is peace in believing and fullness of joy that are heaven begun. There is a consummation in the regenerate life which involves the constant manifest presence of the Holy Spirit uniting the soul to heaven itself, into whose communion the child of God is brought through faith and oneness of spirit. And let no one fret himself because he

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does not experience full assurance; but let him seek to do better service, and to make a more complete surrender; and in the maturing of his Christian character, when he has been too much absorbed in service to look for assurance, he will discover within himself a certainty, the preciousness of which is beyond computation.

CHAPTER X.

CHILD CONVERSION.

THE conversion of children can hardly be considered without including some things which have a general bearing upon the religion of childhood and youth. As has been largely done in the preceding chapters, so here no effort is made to follow theological distinctions. The primary thought is in accord with the query always arising as to the way in which God regards the child, taking into consideration his attitude to the race as shown in the plan of redemption, as well as the practical results following the conversion of children.

What, then, is the status of the child in the kingdom of grace? The answer to this question must largely be founded upon inferences drawn from statements made in the Bible. We may justly infer that the child was included in God's economy of grace under the old dispensation from the fact that in the Old Testament the parents

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were required to teach their children in regard to God's dealings with his people, and also in reference to the significance of the more prominent occasions of the ecclesiastical year. The injunctions given are represented in the statement, "Make them known unto thy children and thy children's children." And the recorded instances of specific religious instruction given in very early life warrant the conclusions that this instruction was to be given in real childhood, and that such children were capable of receiving the information contemplated.

In the New Testament, the Saviour sets a standard with reference to ambitious rivalry, in the little child which he set in the midst of his disciples, and afterward took in his arms. He declared that they should not only not be preëminent in his kingdom, but also that they should not even be admitted, unless they became as the child. "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." And then he points out the way to preëminence by saying, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." And, further, he in-

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dicates the honor in which children are held in his heavenly kingdom by solemnly declaring that whoever serves the little child as belonging to him, serves him. "And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." Then he pronounces the formal warning which we all need to consider, "But whoso shall cause one of these little ones . . . to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea." This language of the Saviour, without violence, will at least permit the inferences that the little child is under such favor of God as to be in a saved state, and that it can be so regarded, whatever is its capability of knowing, or of understanding, or of exercising faith, or of making theological distinctions. The scope of his language seems rather wide to compel its limitations to the single error of ambitious rivalry. It rather suggests the truth in general, in relation to the relative recognition of these two classes in the kingdom of grace.

At the full inauguration of the later dispensation, when it seemed evident that a new order of the kingdom was in manifestation, and that they

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must seek adjustment, they said: "Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you into the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him." If the children to whom the promise is included are to be regarded merely as the descendants of those to whom he spoke, the class would still include the small children. And after such recognition as Jesus gave to the little child, such an inclusion we are almost compelled to allow.

This teaching gives the small child a peculiar place in the dispensation of grace. It marks as groundless that theological hair-splitting which requires so much of transmitted piety, and so many years of the fostering care of the church before the child can be regarded as in a saved state. The fair inference is that by the grace of God it is a member of Christ's family before any definite act under its own conscious direction has had anything to do with the determination of its relations. Not having as yet chosen evil or committed actual

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transgression, it is a child of the kingdom, notwithstanding its Adamic nature. And, if so, the atonement must have restored to the race what was lost in the Adamic transgression, except what is included in the absence of the natural moral bent or tendency to evil, which we know by experience and observation now to be ever-present; and God must not count this tendency sin until it identifies itself in actual transgression.

Then how does the child become degenerate and lose the honor in which it is held in the kingdom of heaven? It is now in a saved state. It also possesses in its nature the tendency to evil. As it advances toward physical and mental maturity it also awakes into a moral and spiritual consciousness. The sense of right and wrong awakes and imposes responsibility. The tendency to evil invites to a choice of evil, and the conscious choice of evil in violation of the sense of right is sin, and "sin when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death."

Can the steps leading astray be retraced? It would seem reasonable to assume that when a child arrives at an age and a degree of intelligence making it capable of choices and acts involving a

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change of relationship to God, and causing it to enter the lost state, it has at the same time arrived at a sufficient degree of development to receive the instruction and to make the choice involving its restoration to its former state and citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. If this is not the case, then there is a period of longer or shorter duration in every child's life when, if it should die, it must forever be doomed to separation from God. Without doubt the real situation is this: Every child is, in its earliest life, in a saved state by virtue of the atonement of Jesus Christ, and remains so until by its own transgression and choice it forfeits God's saving grace and becomes a prodigal. When sufficiently advanced in spiritual discernment to be capable of becoming a prodigal, it is also susceptible to instruction and capable of making choice, to a degree sufficient to enable it to return to the Father's house. Whatever knowledge is necessary to such a return may be attained. Whatever faith is necessary can be exercised. Whatever choice is required can be made. In short, there is no lack of capability on the part of the child itself at any period to debar it from the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus.

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What instruction, then, shall be given the child, and when? If the psychologist can successfully instruct the child while asleep in regard to proper conduct when awake, instruction as to spiritual verities and moral rectitude may in like manner be efficiently given before the conscience and the moral endowments have fully awakened. The world of the child in the crib is exceedingly limited, but the mother repeats in sweet tones the lullaby of her love, and the babe soon learns to recognize it. Not very long will the limitations of infancy forbid the recognition of the love-tones in the story of Jesus the Saviour. And as the powers of recognition gain ground, things known will be joined to things unknown by royal avenues for imagination and inquiry. When to the wondering eyes of the little one the moon is a ball of fire hung high in the skies, he will hear with relish of the Father in heaven beyond the moon and beyond the sun. His comprehension is circumscribed, but instinctively the heart will stand in awe before the mystery, and the God-idea will enter the child-mind, henceforth to remain as a factor in the constructive process of its development. From babyhood, the facts of religion must be

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taught, and we must cease to hesitate lest the time of incipient apprehension be too early, and begin to fear lest already it be late to make the impression by instruction which will abide to determine the conscious choice of God in the years to come.

The child has everything to learn. What he will learn as to religion depends largely upon the faithfulness with which parents and teachers meet their responsibility in the matter. He is to be taught to think of God and led to know him, and prepared for a place in the church and in the kingdom of heaven. And if the soul is immortal and its destiny dependent, so far as his ability to determine it is concerned, upon right choices and acts, the instruction necessary to such a course of conduct is vastly more important than is that which prepares for society and business.

The philosophy of religion has no place in the religious instruction appropriate to this period of life. A knowledge of the questions of theology is not necessary to an acceptance of Jesus Christ, but a knowledge of the cardinal facts of redemption is vital. To know that God is Father, and that Jesus is Saviour, and that the Holy Spirit

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lives in him who chooses to be and to do what he would have him be and do, is enough to furnish a basis for a beautiful confidence and a loving acceptance of the dear Saviour. Besides, the natural order of the mind is first to find "the what," and later, "the why." It is easier to accept a fact as truth than it is to determine why it is truth.

But the facts of redemption are to be impressed upon the child not merely as abstract truth. They are constantly to appear as standing in relation to himself. The Father in heaven is *his* father. The love of Jesus includes *him*. The Holy Spirit broods over *him*. He is not a great sinner outside the covenant of grace, urged to turn to God by accepting Jesus as his personal Saviour, but never to be regarded as having done so. He is a sinner when he has committed sin, but he is a saved sinner when in penitence he turns to the Father. He is to know that God is a loving Heavenly Father, just, but not far away, angry, or waiting to destroy; and that Jesus counts on him, and expects him to choose the right and refuse all wrong, and to depend upon him.

He is not to be taught to expect some great moral transformation consciously taking place, or

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some strikingly conscious spiritual exercise of the mind, before God accepts him. Language that leads to unwarranted expectations must always be guarded against, for expectations not realized lead to distrust. The child's accepting Jesus as his personal Saviour is a simple process of faith, which, in any event, we could hardly expect to be attended by a complex and well-defined experience. In all probability his chief experience will be included in his knowledge of the fact that he has determined to do and to be what Jesus wants him to do and be. The profounder depths of personal experience vouchsafed to the saint of God will accompany the maturity of his consecration and service, when from other standpoints than those from which he now sees things, he shall behold the depths of sin from which he has been saved, and the significance of life's brief day; when he has learned to appreciate the unbounded love of Jehovah and to taste the powers of the life to come.

The end of all instruction is to lead to an acceptance of Jesus Christ, or to edification when he has already been accepted. And this we must expect the instruction which presents God's truth to

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accomplish in the child-heart to a very much greater degree than in the adult. In these susceptible and teachable years we are to expect the sown seed of truth to spring up immediately preparatory to the later harvest. As the facts of redemption become realities to the child-heart they are at once accepted with a fullness and a freedom guaranteeing their mastery, and the artless confession goes up: "Yes, I will love Jesus." "I do want to please him," "I want him to love me." "I must be a better Christian." To direct the promptings of the heart, and to gain the active consent of the will, are the highest ends of all preaching and biblical teaching. All else is to be regarded as incidental. For these purposes God gave his Word, and he declares with reference to it, "It shall not return unto me void, . . . it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." We must confidently expect these highest ends to be gained under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and God's purpose to be accomplished according to his Word. And the church, and the workers in it, will no doubt succeed in holding the children, from whose ranks the future church is to be gathered, in proportion to their own faith in the
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immediate efficiency of the holy Word, when judiciously presented. May we not pray to be delivered from that round of inconsistencies in regard to the conversion of children, which, with the promise that Jesus loves them, invites them to receive him, but when they consent and accept with an abandonment scarcely to be attributed to the hardened sinner in his conversion, repeats and re-repeats the process without advance.

The world in which the child lives is very real to him; but he is living in the learning-period of his life. He expects to be taught, and not to teach. On this account the instruction necessary to lead to proper motive and choice and determination and faith will be more promptly and sincerely received than in later life. He already more nearly possesses the spirit of Christ than he will in later unregenerate life. He has not yet gone far away from his Father's house in voluntary transgression. He is especially susceptible to religious sentiment. He most readily assents to what he believes God asks of him. He is unconsciously and beautifully teachable. He expects new things, and they interest him. He accepts new things, which promise good, with relish. He

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is gathering together and absorbing what will make him a personality, a character. His susceptible heart, his unseared conscience, his will not yet in bondage to habit, together with all the characteristics of young life, present the most hopeful conditions to be found in any period of life. If now he is taught in the fear of God, and his response to the instruction is taken by those to whom he looks for guidance as sincere, the prospect for a life given to things honorable and things godly is most flattering.

Tests taken in widely separated places, and under various circumstances, have invariably shown that the greatest number of professing Christians made a public confession of Christ in those years just preceding maturity into manhood or womanhood. When the earliest decision for Christ was made by these, and how many made the early decision who refused to make the later confession, will never be known. Nor have we at hand the means by which to find out how many make the the later confession who never made the early decision. But the probability is that but few turn to Jesus Christ in open confession, or crystallize a character of sterling integrity into whose early life

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the seed-truth was not by some hand sown to grow a decision for godliness. The plain inference is that the most fruitful field toward which Christian efforts can be directed is that in which are found the child and the youth; but this same period is also richest in opportunity to the kingdom of darkness. Absolute victory here, in most cases, means undisturbed possession for time and eternity. How fearful is the responsibility of parent and pastor and Sunday-school teacher.

Since as to morals and religion the early years of life afford the best opportunities for leading to decision, the most untiring effort must be made to urge the choice and the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ. But these points will not be gained at a single bound. Earthly conditions do not afford unmixed good. No iron bounds can be set by us with all the good on one side, and all the evil on the other; but since the religious status finds its base more in the volitional than in the emotional nature, if the choice and the determination are tending in the right direction, they offer a hope of final mastery; yet the young Christian cannot be expected to feel and act as if mature in years. There are some feelings demanded by thoughtless

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Christians as marks of spirituality which are not necessarily religious at all. Some of these are unnatural to young life. Why should a young Christian experience a profound sense of the brevity of life, or of the imperfection of our righteousness, or of the unsatisfying nature of all things earthly, or of the heinousness of sin, or of the deep depravity of our natures? He knows nothing of these things. Life to him is sweet and long, and he has not yet observed the persistence and the destructive power of sin. And, thank God, spirituality does not consist of sighs and tears and lamentations and groans.

The religion of young life has its misunderstandings and misconceptions. It is not always found consistent with the highest ideals of Christian perfection; but neither is that of the adult perfect, though he may be adept in self-control and dissimulation by which to make a better showing. Young life is vivacious, and eager for life's pleasures and adventures. It laughs and sees through eyes beaming with merriment. Its shadow-clouds pass in an instant; but its optimism is nearer the truth than the pessimism of melancholy, for the world is not a waste howling

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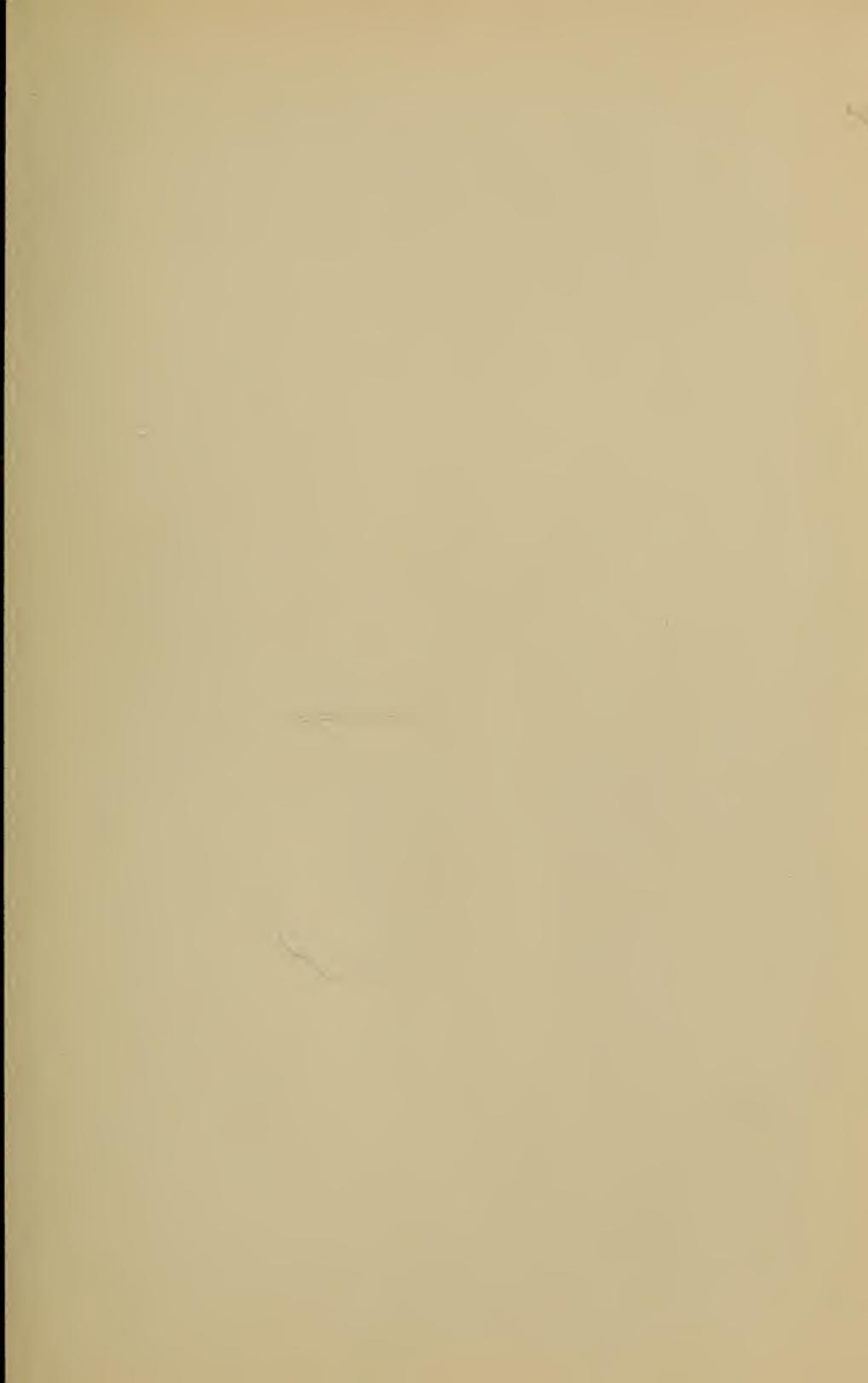
wilderness, and if it were the Christian is not in it to be devoured.

The child is in the kingdom of grace from the beginning. The inherited tendency to evil constantly invites him to choose the wrong; but every choice of right and purpose to be good and to do good, every sorrow for wrong done and petition put up to God, and confession of transgression, and impulse of love to the Saviour, is a stepping-stone in the attainment of a conscious realization of sonship, as in similar circumstances with the adult. With him there probably is a less definite consciousness of the complexity of the process. His conversion takes place simply when his choice is determined for God, and is fully as real and genuine and as trustworthy under proper instruction as that of others more mature. He is a Christian in all essentials if God is chosen, and sin is striven against, in faith and hope.

Then let the child respond to his instruction in repeated confessions of Christ. When older, when he more fully knows what sin is, and appreciates the right, he will crystallize the choice which carries with it faith and repentance and every concomitant work, and will pass the formative period

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of life, developing an increasingly positive conviction as to the facts of redemption and his personal relation to them. And let him also take the vows of church-membership with gladness and confidence, for “to you is the promise and to your children.”



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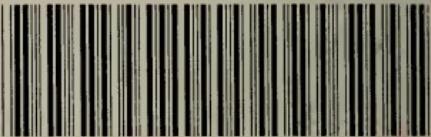
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